

## Chapter 8

# ‘Then give him to the crocodiles’

Violence, state formation, and cultural discontinuity in west central Zambia, 1600-2000

by Wim van Binsbergen

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Although ultimately the state’s monopoly on physical violence underlies the effectiveness of African chiefs’ role in adjudication and arbitration of conflicts during the colonial and post-colonial periods, violence has for a long time served as an implicit boundary condition of the social and legal processes that are at the heart of the work of Emile van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal. It is mainly in his last few cinematographic contributions to the study of African law that the real or implied violence of the post-colonial state becomes part of the equation. In this respect he reflects a persistent, and pardonable, orientation in legal anthropology: where there is violence, law is not, and the legal anthropologist is at a loss.

Not so the historian of Africa. If twentieth-century African chiefs, who are more or less effectively incorporated in the central state, are the heirs to rulers of earlier centuries, violence plays a major role both in these rulers’ performance and ideology, and in the ways in which historians have sought to understand them. For instance, underlying my earlier analyses of pre-colonial state formation in west central Zambia and especially my *Tears of Rain* (1992) is a view of the central role of violence (particularly as surrounding the male kings who supplanted earlier queens and clan leaders) in shaping the states that emerged in this region as from the seventeenth century CE.<sup>2</sup> Violence could play this role since it amounted to formulating, for the royal courts, cultural norms and practices that constituted a radical departure from the norms and practices governing life in the villages which surrounded the courts and which

---

<sup>1</sup> An earlier, Dutch version of this paper was published as van Binsbergen 1993a.

<sup>2</sup> Van Binsbergen 1992.

fed the latter with tribute, including food, and with much of its personnel, including slaves. The purpose of the present paper is to make this view explicit and to begin to explore the extent to which violence can be said to underlie any form of state formation in pre-colonial Africa. A vignette derived from a nineteenth-century travelogue will help focus on the main issues, but of course is only meant as an illustration; the substantial oral-historical, documentary and legendary data underlying my argument having been presented elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

The backdrop to the present argument is the substantial body of literature on state formation in pre-colonial Africa.<sup>4</sup> Even a cursory review is outside our present scope. Let me merely highlight a few themes that will resonate in my subsequent argument.

In the course of the twentieth century, the exponential growth of knowledge of African cultures, studied<sup>5</sup> in their own right and on their own terms, resulted (after initial stress on the *intercontinental* flow of trade goods, ideas and elites in the process of African pre-colonial state formation) in an increased emphasis on *internal* dynamics of African societies and cultures. In addition to archaeology, linguistics, and various ancillary disciplines from the natural sciences, historians of African state formation have greatly relied on anthropological inspiration. The latter enabled them to approach oral data, including myths, with considerable sophistication, and to scrutinise them (by way of source criticism) in the light of a socio-political reading of the contemporary society, in which these sources are produced and in which they are now functioning as charters, as rival versions of the past serving present-day factional competition, etc. Even among historians of Africa there has been a shift of emphasis, from history as a reconstruction of some objective past to the production (by local participants, but in a not essentially different fashion by professional scholars) of myths on the past, with a view to the present and the future.<sup>6</sup> Yet the fact remains that historians, stressing narrative, periodisation and quality of sources over systematic, theoretically-informed patterns, come

---

<sup>3</sup> Fieldwork was undertaken in 1972-74, and during shorter visits in 1977, 1978, 1981, 1988, 1989, 1992 (twice), 1994 (twice) and 1995. I am indebted to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, for the most generous encouragement and financial support; and to research participants, assistants and government officials in Zambia, and members of my family, for invaluable contributions to the research. My special recognition goes to the late Mwene Kahare Kabambi I, who for decades welcomed me in his royal establishment, and finally (cf. van Binsbergen in press, ch. 8) adopted me as one of his sons.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lonsdale 1981; cf. Fage & Oliver 1977, 1978; UNESCO 1981, 1984, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> As least, this is what North Atlantic Africanists have claimed. For a critique of that claim, cf. van Binsbergen 1999a, 1999b, and in press, and the extensive literature cited there.

<sup>6</sup> Vansina 1983.

with somewhat different objectives to the study of African state formation than anthropologists.<sup>7</sup>

On the anthropological side, the neo-Marxist paradigm of the articulation of modes of production – now more or less received within main-stream anthropology, whatever the vicissitudes of Marxism and communism since the 1970s – has proved helpful in offering a model for the political economy of statehood and state formation.<sup>8</sup> It juxtaposes,

- on the one hand, a local, ‘lineage’ or ‘domestic’ mode of production, of essentially autarkic and egalitarian village communities of commoners (internally ranked mainly in terms of gender and age) based on hunting, fishing and agriculture, with
- on the other hand, exploitative royal capitals or courts; the latter would typically not engage in production but would be dependent, for their reproduction, on the extraction of surplus products and surplus labour from the domestic communities.

This extraction – in the form of networks of tribute, enforced by means both military and ideological/ symbolic/ ritual – enabled the royal courts to function as nodal points of regional, transcontinental and intercontinental trade, further strengthening their dominance over the domestic communities with the material and ideological proceeds from these wider contacts. From this perspective, the study of state formation amounts to identifying the factors and conditions under which the exploitative articulation between local communities and royal courts could arise and consolidate itself. The local articulation process was often concomitant with the further peripheral articulation to a third mode of production: the mercantile capitalism as represented by entrepreneurs (in the last few centuries mainly Europeans), which by the end of the nineteenth century were largely supplanted (in a further side of articulation and capitalist hegemony), on African soil, by local branches of industrial en agricultural capitalism in alliance with the colonial state.

Beyond political economy, various schools of comparative anthropology – all in their own way stressing timeless, paradigmatic systematics over properly historical narrative – have reflected on the *cultural* aspects of state formation in Africa. Of essentially structural-functionalist inspiration has been the *Early*

---

<sup>7</sup> For South Central Africa the pioneer publication is Vansina 1966, while his subsequent work (e.g. Vansina 1973, 1978, 1983, 1986, 1990) has exercised great influence in this field. Further see e.g. Roberts 1973; Mainga 1973; Hoover 1980; Schecter 1980; Reeve 1981.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985a, 1985b.

*State* cluster of studies,<sup>9</sup> which has owed a great deal to the systematising and organisational efforts of Henry Claessen and, initially, Peter Skalník.<sup>10</sup> These studies have stressed the enormous range of variation of cultural and structural traits of polities which were called ‘early states’.<sup>11</sup> These studies also formulated useful empirical generalisations with regard to patterns of ideology, kinship organisation, gender relations, and the internal formal organisation of offices at the centre of states of this type. More controversial but perhaps also more profound, the Belgian structuralist de Heusch has for decades been engaged in a project that seeks to assess the ‘prehistory of Bantu thought’,<sup>12</sup> bringing out, largely in mythical and ritual material, such repetitive patterns as royal incest and puberty rites. This led him to the contention that the cultural material out of which the political culture of pre-colonial statehood in east, central and south-central Africa was forged, had been available for centuries, if not millennia, before the actual materialisation of such states – for which, with notable exceptions in north-eastern Africa (Ancient Egypt and Nubia), we have mainly evidence for the second millennium of the Common Era. Conveniently ignored by the main stream of anthropological analysis outside the German-speaking countries,<sup>13</sup> German diffusionism showed less interest in the internal relations between specific African pre-colonial states and their local communities; instead this school of African Studies concentrated on the distribution and origin of the cultural forms attending statehood. Thus, Frobenius,<sup>14</sup> after earlier work on other parts of Africa, had daringly formulated ideas (not altogether unlike de Heusch’s much later) concerning what he referred to as ‘the South Erythraean cultural complex’,<sup>15</sup> extending over much

---

<sup>9</sup> Unthinkable without Fortes & Evans-Pritchard classic collection *African Political Systems* of 1940.

<sup>10</sup> Claessen 1984, 1986; Claessen & Skalník 1978, 1981; Claessen & van de Velde 1987.

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps because of their deviation from the model of the – now somewhat obsolescent – bureaucratic, constitutionally anchored nation state of the nineteenth and twentieth century, which appears to form the reference point of the evolutionism implied in the term ‘early state’.

<sup>12</sup> De Heusch 1972, 1982; cf. van Binsbergen 1993b.

<sup>13</sup> Anglo-Saxon equivalents like Perry (1927) and Elliot Smith (1929) were to be completely eclipsed by the emergence of British social anthropology from the 1930s onwards.

<sup>14</sup> Frobenius 1912-1913, 1931, 1933.

<sup>15</sup> Strikingly to the point is still Becker’s (1913: 303) characterisation of the weaknesses and strength of Frobenius’ work, formulated with reference to the latter’s volumes on Nigeria, then recently published: ‘I. *Auf den Trümmern des klassischen Atlantis*; II. *An der Schwelle des verehrungswürdigen Byzanz* [volume titles of Frobenius 1912-1913]:

‘...[M]an mag diese Titel dem Verfasser verübeln, man mag sich an dem künstlerisch-persönlichen Charakter seiner Arbeit stoßen, man mag die herkömmliche wissenschaftliche Dokumentierung vermissen, ja man mag über den Schwung seiner Phantasie entsetzt die Hände zusammenschlagen, – eine ernste wissenschaftliche Kritik soll sich dabei nicht aufhalten, sondern auf den Kern der Sache eingehen und die Probleme dieses

of the area between the Congo basin and the Limpopo river, and with such features as ritual regicide,<sup>16</sup> royal incest, firm social control (e.g. through puberty ritual) over female sexuality from which however princesses were exempted, and a strong astronomical/ calendrical element emphasising the consonance between human and celestial (including meteorological) phenomena, with the king as the indispensable ritual link between both. The flight of Frobenius' intuitive comparisons brought him to consider even trans-continental continuities with ancient Mesopotamia and pre-Indo-European i.e. Dravidian South India. Other anthropological studies, more firmly rooted in the ethnography and historiography of South Central Africa and following a more recent methodology, have considered the requisites for legitimation of the state systems that emerged in that region from ca. 1500 CE. These studies have stressed the extent to which military and trading elites, in the process of state formation, have appropriated a presumably much older symbolic idiom revolving on the cult of the land – co-opting or usurping the 'ecological' prerogatives of an older, pre-statal priesthood in the local communities, with such functions as rain calling, the warding off of drought, pests and other natural disasters, and the adjudication of sorcery, incest and murder which were thought to upset the cosmology and to endanger fertility.<sup>17</sup>

Truncated to the point of caricature as this overview is, it may serve to bring out that *violence* has not been given a central place in anthropological arguments on state formation in Africa. Against this background, let us turn to west central Zambia.

### **Chiefs in west central Zambia: Colonial and post-colonial**

For the anthropologist and the oral historian, the local and contemporary setting is the obvious point of departure in the analysis. Today there are no independent states on the fertile, well-watered, only slightly elevated lands that form the Zambezi/ Kafue watershed. Those that existed there in the first half of the nineteenth century now mainly survive in the form of the four chiefdoms of *Mwene* ('King', 'Lord'; pl. *Myene*) Mutondo, *Mwene* Kahare, *Mwene* Kabulwebulwe and *Mwene* Momba. These are royal figures recognised, and (in the

---

gedankenreichen, unermüdlichen und erfolgreichen Forschers unter die kritische Lupe nehmen. Da wird wohl manches schöne Gebäude zusammenbrechen, *aber immer noch genug übrig bleiben, das unseren Dank verdient.*' (Italics added, WvB)

<sup>16</sup> Ritual regicide has been a theme in comparative anthropology since Frazer's (1957) *Golden Bough*, first published in 1890; for subsequent work, cf. Feeley-Harnik 1985. A brilliant recent study of the East African rain-makers whose precarious relationship with their communities (often involving being killed) appears to amount to a rudimentary form of ritual regicide, is Simonse 1992.

<sup>17</sup> Schoffeleers 1979, 1992; van Binsbergen 1981: chapters 3 & 4.

case of Mutondo and Kahare) subsidised, by the central Zambian state established at Independence in 1964. By virtue of a nomenclatural dynamics we shall probe into below, their subjects together constitute an ethnic group which in the course of the twentieth century increasingly identified as Nkoya. In addition, there are dozens of other titles which lack such recognition and remuneration, and which have now been relegated to the status of hereditary councillors to the four royal chiefs, if not to the status of mere village headmen – their former royal prerogatives usurped and eclipsed in the course of regional incorporation processes. As from 1840, the several small-scale states of west central Zambia came to be politically and economically incorporated in the expanding state system of the Kololo. The Kololo were militarily organised South African immigrants who had captured the Luyana<sup>18</sup> state of the Lozi or Barotse. The latter's centre was the Zambezi flood plain between today's towns of Kalabo and Mongu. Although the Luyana state was to be recaptured on the Kololo in 1864, its hold on the states on the Zambezi/ Kafue watershed persisted. It even increased when, with the advent of the colonial state in 1900, the latter had accorded the Luyana state protectorate status. In the process, the colonial state fictitiously assumed the Luyana state's pre-colonial territory to extend over all of the then Northwestern Rhodesia, i.e. the huge area between Angola, the Victoria Falls and Katanga, in most parts of which the Luyana king had been virtually unknown and without effective political power.

But although the Nkoya kings have been largely deprived of their former formal powers, their ceremonial court culture has largely survived. The main exception is human sacrifice, which did not publicly survive, although it is still often hinted at in court circles. The *Kazanga* harvest festival, whose falling into disuse during the colonial period is not unrelated to the central role human sacrifice played in this royal ceremony, was only reinstated in 1988, in greatly altered form. The twentieth-century vitality of most other aspects of local court culture is especially marked at the capitals of *Mwene* Mutondo and *Mwene* Kahare, who were accepted as senior members of the Lozi aristocracy and hence of the colonially-subsidised indigenous administration of Barotseland, even though their ethnic and linguistic identity was not Lozi/ Barotse but Nkoya. The complex, time-honoured organisation of their courts has continued to define such offices as the *Mwene*, his sisters (*Bampanda wa Mwene*), his wives (*Mahano*), princes and princesses (*Babana wa Mwene*, any offspring

---

<sup>18</sup> Luyana, Lui, Luyi, are alternative local ethnonyms for the dominant ethnic group which, particularly in the writings of Max Gluckman and in the colonial administration, came to be known as the Barotse or the Lozi. Luyana is also the name of the Central Bantu language (Guthrie number K.31) spoken here before the Kololo imposed their Southern Bantu Sotho language (Guthrie number S.30), now developed into the language called Lozi (Guthrie number K.21). The Nkoya language is classified as L.62, although it is closely related to Luyana.

born to an incumbent *Mwene*), his Prime Minister (*Mwanashihemi*), senior councillors with titled ranks as judicial, protocolar and military officers, priests, executioners, musicians and hunters. In addition, the court houses clients, many obliquely reputed to be of slave descent. If court office has continued to be coveted and contested until today, it is not only because it has offered virtually unique opportunities for salaried employment in the local countryside, but also because the political and symbolic order such office represents is still highly meaningful to the subjects of the *Myene*. As a distinctive physical structure – marked by a royal fence with pointed poles (*Lilapa*), within which the *Mwene*'s palace, audience/ court room, regalia shelter and royal shrine are situated – with at a conveniently short distance the sacred grove where the graves of earlier *Myene* are administered by the court priests,<sup>19</sup> these capitals (*zinkena*, sing. *lukena*) have continued to represent the spatial centres of Nkoya political ideas throughout the twentieth century. Nkoya ethnic revival, through the modern formal organisation of the Kazanga Cultural Association as from the early 1980s,<sup>20</sup> has focused on the *zinkena*, and has been saturated with local and regional 'traditional' politics. Significantly, the association derives its name from the ancient harvest festival it has managed to revive.

In the countryside of west central Zambia it still makes sense to apply the notion of two distinct modes of production, one domestic and the other tributary, each with its particular set of productive and power relations, and each with its particular underlying logic which exists *sui generis*, in the sense that it cannot be reduced to the logic of the other mode of production to which it is linked. Formally, slavery and tribute labour (the two main sources of labour at the *zinkena* in the nineteenth century) lost their legal basis in the 1910s, and in practice they ceased to exist in the 1930s. Yet the *Mwene* can and does still command inputs of free labour time when it comes to such tasks as the maintenance of the royal fence, the construction of shelters at the *lukena*, and similar productive labour undertaken either for the upkeep of the *lukena* or in the context of development activities (erection of schools, clinics, maintenance of roads) concentrated around the *lukena*. Interestingly, the traditionalist and *Mwene*-orientated stance of the Kazanga society enables its leaders to draw on this same reservoir of tribute-related labour for the

---

<sup>19</sup> This is only a twentieth-century development, caused by the fact that under the colonial state a royal capital could no longer, as in pre-colonial times, be moved over distances of scores of kilometres after the death of the king. However, pre-colonial royal burial sites surrounded by deserted *zinkena* which have returned to bush, have continued to be venerated even if at great distances from the capitals of later incumbents; cf. van Binsbergen 1992: 44f, 341f, 451f.

<sup>20</sup> An initiative of relatively successful Nkoya urban migrants living on the distant Line of Rail who there have had access to ideological, political, symbolic and career models very different from those prevailing in the countryside. Cf. van Binsbergen 1992-1994, 1996, 1999, 2000.

construction and maintenance of its festival grounds, not only when these were still situated at the *lukena* of *Mwene* Mutondo (until 1992) but also when the festival was subsequently moved to a new site at equal distance from the capitals of Mutondo and Kahare. Formal tribute (*ntupu*) is no longer levied by the *Myene*, but in practice the customary greeting of the *Mwene* by villagers and returning urban migrants tends to be accompanied by gifts (still designated *ntupu*) in the form of cash or manufactured liquor, while in local production by villagers around the *lukena* (e.g. beer brewing, alcohol distilling, hunting, fishing, agriculture) the *Mwene*'s prerogatives are often recognised by a gift of produce.<sup>21</sup>

However, even in this cash-starved rural environment these material prestations cannot be considered anything but minimal. They no longer come close to the order of magnitude of court-village exploitation in the first half of the nineteenth century. Of the military, political, economic and ideological structure of kingship at that time, it is mainly the ideological elements that have persisted, no longer effectively supported by, nor supporting, material exploitation. And, as we shall presently see, even these ideological elements have undergone radical alterations.

Of course, at present it is not very easy for the local villagers to maintain the illusion – which must have rather well corresponded with the realities of the early nineteenth century – that the *lukena*, in a largely implicit but well developed ritual, political and economic spatial cosmology, is the hub of the universe. The *Myene* themselves have been active in the outside world, usually pursuing salaried careers before acceding to their royal office. A *Mwene*'s interaction within the sphere of the Lozi indigenous administration of Western Province (the former Barotseland), and especially within the central state and its institutions at the national, provincial and district level (e.g. House of Chiefs, Provincial Development Committee, District Rural Council), makes it very clear that the *lukena* is now very much a periphery of the world as even the villagers have come to know it. Admittedly, most of these royal activities take place outside the gaze of the subjects. The subordination to external superior political and administrative which they invariably imply for the *Mwene*'s position, is seldom made explicit but usually covered under traditionalist decorum with plenty of respectful squatting and hand-clapping on the part of modern state officials and other visiting outsiders. As late as the 1970s many of *Mwene* Kahare's subjects could therefore still cherish the illusion that whenever he was summoned to the national capital Lusaka to attend a meeting of the House of Chiefs (an advisory body to the government

---

<sup>21</sup> For an analysis of the *lukena* economy in terms of the articulation of modes of production, cf. van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985b: 261-270. For the court music, cf. Brown 1984.



with hardly any formal powers) he went there ‘to rule Zambia’. And even if the *lukena* could no longer count as the centre of the universe, the *Mwene*’s area was scarcely considered a part of the national territory of Zambia. In the Nkoya villages, the national political space, however extending to the local scene at times of national elections, was usually referred to as ‘out there, in Zambia’.

Chiefs, in Zambia and increasingly elsewhere in Africa,<sup>22</sup> have managed to maintain for themselves a position of respect, as well as influence and freedom of manoeuvre in the wider national society far exceeding their formal powers as defined by post-independence constitutions.<sup>23</sup> This obviously has to do with the legitimisation gap of a modern bureaucratically-organised state based on mere legal authority, in a social context where for most citizens – and especially for those with a rural, traditionalistic outlook – the ideological, symbolic and cosmological appeal of such legal authority is partial and limited. The contemporary heirs to pre-colonial kings are co-opted in order to lend, to the central state, some of their own legitimacy and symbolic power. The actual distribution of power in contemporary African nation-states therefore differs considerably from the blueprint of that distribution as formally stipulated by the national Constitution. By virtue of occupying a pivotal position in the historic cosmology shared by large numbers of villagers and traditionally-orientated urban migrants, the chiefs represent a force that modernising state elites have found difficult to by-pass or obliterate.

This gives the impression that the cultural dimension of pre-colonial statehood has persisted in the face of the colonial and post-colonial decline of the kings’ or chiefs’ formal powers. However, it is more likely that this cultural dimension of court life, particularly the villagers’ readiness to view it as coterminous with (even central to), rather than as antagonistic to, the structure and ideology of village life, arose in the twentieth century precisely as a result of such decline in the context of incorporation in the central colonial and post-colonial state. Let us explore this point a bit further.

Twentieth-century ethnicisation processes did have an enormous impact upon the perception of chieftainship in Western Zambia.<sup>24</sup> ‘Nkoya’ was the name of a forested area and of a numerically limited ruling group (the clan owning the royal title of Mutondo) prior to its becoming the name of an ethnic group (comprising a much larger number of people) in the process of Luyana and colonial incorporation. And since the main distinctive feature of this newly-emerged group was its ‘chief’ (during colonial times the heir and lineal descendant of the nineteenth-century ruler), during most of the twentieth

---

<sup>22</sup> E.g. van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1987; Goheen 1992; Brempong *et al.* 1995.

<sup>23</sup> Van Binsbergen 1987.

<sup>24</sup> This in fact is a major theme throughout *Tears of Rain*. Cf. van Binsbergen 1985, 1992b.

century we face a situation where being Nkoya is mainly defined by a person's allegiance to one of the four royal chiefs classified as Nkoya. In the first half of the nineteenth century however, Mutondo's capital, far from being fixed in its present position, found itself in various successive locations a hundred kilometres or more from where it became fixed under colonial rule. And while a collective identifying as 'the Nkoya' owned the title, the Mutondo ruler at the time held sway over an area of thousands of square kilometres. This area was inhabited by people who lived in villages which each were ethnically and linguistically fairly homogeneous (but the kingdom as a whole was highly heterogeneous both ethnically and linguistically). They did pay tribute to the *Mwene*, but in great majority did not identify as Nkoya; they often did not, or did far from completely, share in the forms of what a hundred and fifty years later we have come to call Nkoya culture. They often spoke other languages (e.g. Ila, Kaonde, Tonga, Totela, Luba, Lunda and Lenje) than the language which is classified as Nkoya today. In other words, the culture of kingship in west central Zambia was not specific to any of the local 'ethnic' cultures that are commonly identified in that region today, but was shared whatever the specificities (in patterns of production and reproduction, language, kinship system etc.) of the various local village cultures. And in a way it was shared *only from a distance*. For in many respects this courtly culture was pursued by people who, while living at the court, were linguistically, ethnically and symbolically relative strangers or newcomers in the region. The *Myene* and their courtiers had relatively recently (a matter of decades, one or two century at the very most) implanted a Lunda-derived aristocratic pattern of tributary exploitation from southern Congo, with a selection of its administrative, ceremonial and ritual trappings, upon the local village societies of west central Zambia. The manifest local continuity of the latter (e.g. in terms of linguistic traits and particularly material culture including pottery) over almost two millennia is incompatible with the tradition of recent immigration from the north as maintained in the *lukena* milieu throughout the twentieth century.

It is very likely that the successive incorporation, more or less at minority status, in the wider state systems of the Kololo, Luyana and British, served to blur the cultural and structural distinctions between the 'Nkoya' court and the local villages, since now the court was no longer the exploitative 'other' but, on the contrary, the instance from which the local population increasingly derived their ethnic name and identity amidst the inimical and exploiting wider world. From an exploiting and terrifying stranger, the *Mwene* had become the hallmark of local ethnic identity.

## **The logic of the village and the logic of the royal court in the nineteenth century**

The notion of two modes of production (one defined by kinship, the other by kingship, i.e. the social and symbolic organisation of tributary relations of exploitation) prompts us to explore how court and village initially defined themselves vis-à-vis each other in the local social formation. *Tears of Rain* argues that the sources allow us to trace, in considerable detail, the emergence of states in west central Zambia as the imposition, upon an older local village-based mode of production, of a tributary mode revolving on royal courts – where tribute and the spoils of raiding would be partly hoarded, partly redistributed to the villages, partly utilised in networks of long-distance trade linking this inland region to the very distant Indian and Atlantic Oceans.<sup>25</sup>

In the cultural elaboration of the kingship, we see considerable comparative continuities with other African kingdoms as described in the anthropological literature, with regard to such traits as: court organisation and offices, ritual separation between king and subjects, the frequency of regicide and dethronement, the role of regalia especially royal musical instruments, the prominent political and sexual role of royal women (even the suggestion that the prerogatives of kingship originally belonged to them rather than to their male consanguineal kin), the association with Mvula, ‘Rain’ (the demiurge from whom the kings claim descent) and with the mythical Tower built into the sky (which was similar to that of Mesopotamian Babel – Genesis 11 – even in that its building was said to be inspired by human insolence, while its downfall allegedly caused a similar multiplicity of languages and ethnic groups),<sup>26</sup> the king’s exclusive rights over certain aspects of the natural environment (elephant, eland, leopard; fishing pools), and the vicissitudes of royal association with male puberty ritual.

Whatever these regional and continental continuities, the cultural material out of which the Nkoya kingship materialised in the nineteenth century CE, appears to be more immediately a confluence from basically two origins:

- ritual, women-dominated or at least gender-indifferent clan leadership in the pre-state local society, with pacifist intra-group reconciliation, and the careful ritual and productive management of natural resources; and
- a tradition of male-dominated kingship and fully-fledged statehood locally introduced by aristocratic offshoots from the well-organised,

---

<sup>25</sup> Van Binsbergen 1992.

<sup>26</sup> Roberts 1973 (Tower); van Binsbergen 1993b (male puberty rites).

powerful and (due to new food crops) overpopulated empire of the Mwaat Yaamv in Southern Congo from the sixteenth century onwards.

Mwaat Yaamv or Mwato Yamvo is the title of the ruler of Musumba, who throughout the nineteenth century was a major political and economic force in what is today southern Congo. His name means 'Lord of Death'. This title ambiguously refers both to the violence by which his rule was enforced over a very wide area (extending well into present-day Zambia), and<sup>27</sup> to the spectacular manner in which the incumbent was to be butchered to death at the hands of his councillors when his allotted time of incumbence was over.

While the kingship strand has sought to legitimate itself by adopting the symbolic trappings of the egalitarian and ritual clan-leadership strand, there is a strong suggestion of discontinuity here. In the process of state formation, the role of women was re-defined so as to push them to away from leadership, to a periphery of symbolic pollution and political incompetence, and the benevolent cosmological anchorage of the clan leadership in the mediation between human society and nature (imperfectly replaced by a new cult of royal ancestors) was to give way to an increasing emphasis on both physical and mystical violence (sorcery). Hunting, male puberty ritual, warfare and notions of female menstrual pollution furnish the ingredients for the rise of a violent male ideology – the symbolic core of the emergent statehood. Emulating the distant court of the 'Lord of Death' from which they had broken away, the courts in west central Zambia become centres of terror, not only by the implied or real violence supporting tributary networks, but also by a cult of violence surrounding the kingship itself, for instance:

- the human skulls that served as drinking vessels at the court;
- the human sacrifices required, as foundation victims, for the establishment of the *Lukena*, the *Lilapa* and the royal graves, and for the manufacture and inauguration of the major royal drums (*Mawoma*);
- human sacrifice as central part of the original *Kazanga* festival;
- the well-being of the king claimed to depend on medicine prepared out of humans killed for the purpose;
- the executioner's axe (*shibanga*) which, more than the sacred musical instruments, is cherished by *Mwene* Kahare, as the sole regalia to be kept inside the palace (rather than in the regalia shelter outside) and to be brandished in his solo dance at the *Kazanga* festival;
- the court office of the *tupondwa*, the king's executioners and purveyors of human remains...

---

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Frazer 1957.

As background to all this we may point to the region's opening up to trans-continental and intercontinental trade, and to a general increase in warfare and entrepreneurship throughout South Central Africa; yet such a perspective in terms of mode-of-production analysis in itself does not seem to explain the emphasis on violence in state formation in west central Zambia.

At any rate, henceforth the kingship will present a Janus face to the surrounding village society: in certain respects and in certain contexts it is in continuity with the pre-statal idiom of clan leadership which used to underpin the cultural orientation of local villages, but in other respects and contexts the kingship is to represent an abrupt and absolute break vis-à-vis that society.<sup>28</sup>

The breaking-points are violence, terror, exploitation, non-reciprocity; and monopoly over material produce, regalia, conflict regulation, ideological production, and indeed over violence. If the emergent polities of west central Zambia in the second half of the present millennium are hard to define as states,<sup>29</sup> towards the end of their existence, in the mid-nineteenth century, they were states at least in this respect that, conform Weber's definition,<sup>30</sup> they sought to exercise a monopoly of interpersonal physical violence within their territory.

Thus when around 1880 Shangambo, the later *Mwene* Shamamano Kahare and grandfather of the late *Mwene* Kahare Kabambi I, took the blood feud to members of the Lubanda ethnic group who had killed his mother's brother Kalumpiteka after rejecting the latter's claims to royal status in their area,

---

<sup>28</sup> As I have argued elsewhere (van Binsbergen 1981, 1992a, 1992c; van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985b) such striking contradictions in the cultural set-up of what pretends to be a unified and integrated cultural system, are useful pointers to structural and historical heterogeneity, often to be interpreted, on the political economy plane, in terms of the contradiction between distinct modes of production, each with its own history and its own logic before and during the articulation process.

<sup>29</sup> Vansina 1993.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Weber (1969: 156):

‘The primary formal characteristics of the modern state are as follows: it possesses an administrative and legal order subject to change by legislation, to which the organised corporate activity of the administrative staff, which is also regulated by legislation, is oriented. This system of order claims binding authority, not only over the members of the state, the citizens, most of whom have obtained membership by birth, but also to a very large extent, over all action taking place in the area of its jurisdiction. It is thus a compulsory association with a territorial basis. Furthermore, to-day, the use of force is regarded as legitimate only so far as it is either permitted by the state or prescribed by it.’

In a state whose backbone consists of tributary networks, the territorial boundaries are dynamic and shifting, but within that periphery the core area is yet well defined. We have insufficient detail on the amount of specific legislation going on in the states of west central Zambia in the eighteenth and nineteenth century; but there is evidence of some (van Binsbergen 1992: 202f). The remainder of Weber's definition applies fairly well to the mid-nineteenth century phase, when Kololo/Luyana incorporation was imminent.

Shangambo was arrested by the trading ruler *Mwene* Kayingu and was made to pay a slave and a gun for this criminal offence.<sup>31</sup>

## The logic of the village and the logic of the royal court systematically compared

In order to substantiate this line of argument, let us systematically juxtapose the cultural logic of the village and of the royal court in ideal-typical form; in order to save space the relevant items are brought together in a matrix rather than in a discursive discussion in the text (Table 1). However, it is important to realise that what is listed is not so much aggregate ethnographic data at the level of concrete, observable interaction, but the analyst's summary reconstruction of the abstracted logic of court and village as implicitly, but often also explicitly, structuring the participants' actions, thoughts and utterances.

	<b>village</b>	<b>royal court</b>
<b>cultural composition</b>	tendency to cultural and linguistic intra-village homogeneity; intra-village minorities of strangers (especially in-marrying spouses) are culturally and linguistically assimilated	rules over a considerable region which displays ethnic, cultural and linguistic heterogeneity; courtly institutions, culture and even language may in many ways differ from the cultural idiom of some or most of the villages in the region
<b>ranking</b>	virtually no ranking between individuals except in terms of age and gender; no elaborate ranking between groups but in stead joking relations stressing complementarity and claims of support between pairs of groups (clans)	elaborate and emphatic hierarchy between individuals and groups at the court: from the king (who is ritually set apart) through royal family, officials/ courtiers, servants to slaves; likewise hierarchical distinction between court as a whole, and villages
<b>production</b>	the actual and recognised basis of social and ritual life is Man's productive contact with nature through hunting, fishing and agriculture	absent, dissimulated, and/or relegated to lowest ranking members of the court (slaves); material reproduction largely or exclusively takes place through extraction of surplus from villages
<b>exchange relations</b>	reciprocity; the items ( $E_1, E_2, \dots$ ) which individuals ( $I_1, I_2, \dots$ ) or groups ( $G_1, G_2, \dots$ ) exchange are classified as being of the same nature, so that exchange is a two-way traffic: $G_i \rightarrow E_1 \rightarrow G_{i+1}$ alternates with $G_{i+1} \rightarrow E_1 \rightarrow G_i$	interdependence but no reciprocity; both internally (within the court, C) and between court and village (V), exchanges are non-reciprocal and involve items ( $E_1, E_2, \dots$ ) which are classified as being of a different nature; e.g. royals gifts, office and honour for loyalty; tribute for protection, adjudication and ritual services; exchange is a one-way traffic: $V \rightarrow E_1 \rightarrow C$ never alternates with $C \rightarrow E_1 \rightarrow V$ ; in stead, its counterpart is $C \rightarrow E_2 \rightarrow V$

<sup>31</sup> Van Binsbergen 1992: 397 and *passim*.

<b>kinship</b>	inclusive idiom of equality, social placement, and recruitment of labour power; although flexible and manipulative, the kinship system dampens rather than enhances intra-group competition; bilateral descent and endogamy constantly blur the boundaries between groups so that social belonging and rights are subject to an ever shifting perspective	exclusive idiom of privilege and rank, expressing (e.g. in the form of perpetual kinship and positional succession), <sup>32</sup> political rather than co-residential, productive and reproductive relations; this political, instrumental use of kinship, with firm boundaries and clear definition of roles and statuses, enhances interpersonal competition for rank and power at the court
<b>violence (both physical, and mystical, in the form of sorcery)</b>	not permissible in intra-group interpersonal relations ; open competition is interpreted and condemned as implying physical and mystical violence	taken for granted both in intra-court interpersonal relations (in competition over power and office) and in the relations between the court and villages
<b>conflict settlement</b>	informal, emphasis on reconciliation, no real sanctions	formal, royal prerogative on violent and often capital punishment of major crimes and of challenge of royal privilege; the court is an appeal court for intra-village conflict settlement
<b>ritual</b>	revolves on self-definition of the community; expels and redresses conflict and violence at the village level, by stressing interdependence and unity of the village; ritual is in the hands of community leaders	revolves on definition of the court in relation to the villages; half-heartedly conceals violent basis of court-village exploitation by presenting king and court as cosmologically indispensable for the villages while at the same time indulging in ritual murder; ritual is in the hands of symbolic specialists including the king

Table 1. Structural differences between village and royal court in nineteenth-century west central Zambia.<sup>33</sup>

The message of Table 1 is clear: whatever the political economy of state formation in west central Zambia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and whatever the cultural history – the patterns of transcontinental or intercontinental diffusion, transformation, bricolage but also original creation and invention – of the material which went into the structuring of the relation between local village society and royal courts, the emergent states in this region turn out to be characterised by a *virtually total denial of the structural principles informing the village communities* in the region. The state is a state in that its structural principles have been socially and culturally constructed so as to represent in an order *sui generis*, which cannot be reduced to the pre-existing order of the civil society. And when the latter is a South Central

<sup>32</sup> These terms will be defined in the next section of the text.

<sup>33</sup> Source: van Binsbergen 1992, 1991a.

African village society based on the reduction or expulsion of violence as detrimental to productive and reproductive face-to-face relationships, then the matching state may primarily define itself by a positive relation with violence. To the extent to which the state represents an exploitative challenge to the civil society that it has subjugated and re-organised, there is little premium on totally concealing state violence under thick layers of ritual and myth; the 'communitas' of collective royal ritual involving all subjects and explicitly punctuated by ritual murder appears to serve the functional requirements more effectively. By the nineteenth century, the pre-colonial states of west central Zambia were trying to find a form of their own, not by tuning in to, but by rejecting the village tenets of reciprocity, pacifism, reconciliation, care for the relatively weak (women, the elderly, children) and for nature. It is only when these states in their local exercise of power had been supplanted by other states (Kololo, Luyana, colonial and post-colonial), that the focus of violence could shift, leaving the organisational and ideological remnants of the Nkoya states with the task of re-defining themselves in a non-violent and more continuous fashion vis-à-vis local civil society. It is then, in the process of incorporative transformation, that the pre-colonial king is transformed from a violent and exploitative outsider, into the hub of ethnic identity and of a nostalgically re-invented traditionalist cosmology.

### **'Then give him to the crocodiles'**

Thus in west central Zambia (and, I contend, also in many other parts of Africa, although the space is lacking here for an assessment of the comparative data), state formation entailed the imposition, upon local village communities, of a more or less centralised socio-political structure representing a total departure from the social organisation and ideology prevailing in earlier, pre-state times.

In the specific context of the expansion of the Lunda political culture over much of South Central Africa, the typical form of statehood emerging from that transformation had two salient features as identified by Schechter:<sup>34</sup> *perpetual kinship* and *positional succession*, neither of which corresponded closely with structural themes in local village society. Together these made for the powerful organisational and mobilisational structure of the Lunda-ised states, of which the Nkoya states merely formed the extreme, and diluted, southern periphery.

---

<sup>34</sup> Schechter 1980.



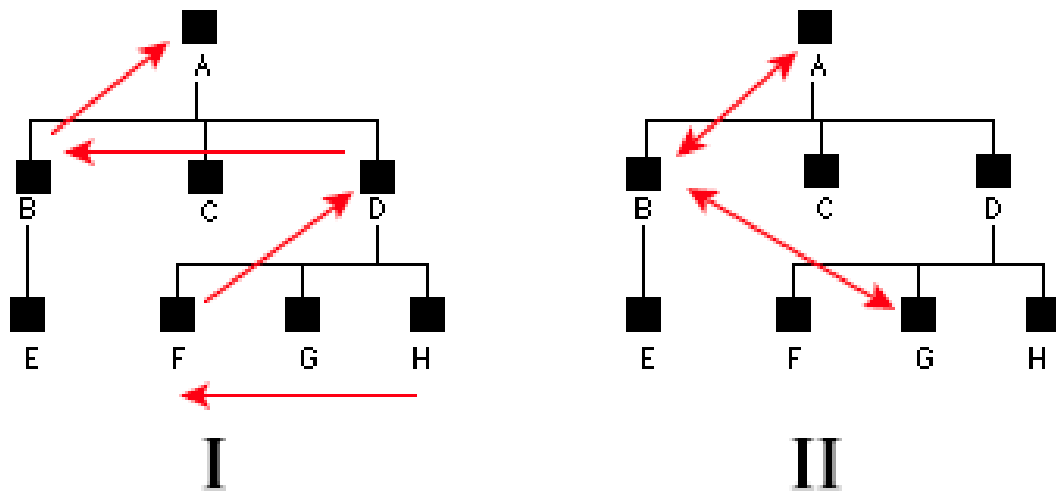


Figure 1. Positional succession (I) and perpetual kinship (II) as principles of Lunda political organisation.

I. The dendrogram is not a genealogy, but shows a hierarchy of political positions within a state, from Paramount Chief (A), via regional chiefs (B, C, D), to district chiefs (E, F, G, H), ordered according to seniority from left to right. If the incumbent A vacates the paramountcy, this will be the sign for a complete reshuffle: he will be succeeded by the incumbent of the most senior regional chieftaincy B, the latter by C, and so on.

II. Again, the dendrogram is not a genealogy, but shows a hierarchy of political positions within a state. However, conceptually it takes on the connotations of a fictive genealogy, in this sense that the incumbent of the Paramountcy (A) is always considered to be the father of the regional chief B, irrespective of the age and of the actual genealogical relationships – if any – between the incumbents. By the same token, the incumbent of the regional chieftainship B is always considered the great or senior father (i.e. paternal uncle) of the incumbent of the district chieftainship G. Such kinship is perpetual in the sense that the relationships it defines are immutable: new incumbents simply assume their predecessor's fictive genealogical position. The combination of devices I and II has a considerable regulating effect on succession, protocol, seniority, jurisdiction etc.

Perpetual kinship expresses the political relationships between rulers and between aristocrats in terms of fictive kinship, so that the incumbent of position A is always identified as e.g. the younger brother of the incumbent of position B; political alliance and difference in rank are distinctly expressed in this idiom, which only uses the kinship idiom metaphorically.

Positional succession, as the complementary device, stipulates a fixed order of incumbency and promotion in office encompassing all the senior political positions within a state 'bureaucracy', by virtue of which all incumbents move one place up when one incumbent in a more senior position dies or otherwise has to be replaced.

The literature on the Lunda realm shows how these organisational formulae have greatly strengthened state organisations; and while these states have seldom been examined from the point of view of a total transformation of the

pre-state order, dynastic myths of origin at least bring out the element of a historic break, a rupture represented by the advent of statehood.

Particularly among the Nkoya's western neighbours, the Lozi, all these elements are very manifest, and can be gleaned from the works of Gluckman, Mutumba Mainga, Muuka and Prins.<sup>35</sup> But they are perhaps best brought out in the following anecdote that was told by the famous big-game hunter F.C. Selous about the encounter between a White trader and Sipopa, the Lozi king (1864-1876) who restored the Luyana dynasty after a quarter of a century of Kololo occupation:

'In Sepopo's [Sipopa's] time many people were executed for witchcraft and other offences, and their bodies thrown to the crocodiles. (...) One day, as he [Mr T., a trader, and friend of Selous] was drinking beer with Sepopa, a very old man crept up and begged for food. The king, turning to some of his men, asked who he was, and learned that he belonged to one of the slave tribes. He then said: "He's a very old man; can he do any work?" and was informed that the old man was quite past work, and depending upon charity – a very, very scarce article in the interior of Africa. Then said the king: "Take him down to the river and hold his head under water", and the old man was forthwith led down to the river. Presently the executioner returned. "Is the old man dead?" said Sepopa. "Dead he is", they answered. "Then give him to the crocodiles," said the king, and went on drinking beer and chatting to my friend T.'<sup>36</sup>

This is more than a simple tale of royal cruelty, although – in line with our argument – Sipopa's reputation as a tyrant is well-established.<sup>37</sup> We see the Lozi king negotiating between three different social spheres:

- the state, defining relations between the king, his court officers, an animal species (the crocodile) as a royal emblem, and his subjects including 'slave tribes';
- peripheral mercantile capitalism whose penetration brings the king in contact with European traders, in the pursuit of mutual benefits; and
- the kinship-based social order at the village level, where commensality rules and where the elderly (to whom all juniors are linked by ties of real, putative or fictive kinship including joking relations – whose standard expression is in terms of the grandparent/ grandchild relationship) are to be supported and honoured, but at the same time are feared for their obvious powers of sorcery (also considered a form of 'work') without which they could never have attained their advanced age.

---

<sup>35</sup> Gluckman 1943, 1951, 1967, 1968a, 1968b; Mutumba Mainga 1973; Muuka 1966; Prins 1980.

<sup>36</sup> Selous 1893: 249f.

<sup>37</sup> Holub 1879.

Seeking to entertain and impress the representative of mercantile capitalism, Sipopa's action celebrates the absolute supremacy of his state over the village order, and the absolute rejection of the latter's principles of seniority and commensality. The specifics of the episode are revealing and decidedly ironic: it was with a Nkoya-speaking 'slave tribe' that Sipopa had found refuge during Kololo rule, and it was among them, through ties of fictive kinship with specific senior hunters acting as his mentors, that he had received his training and initiation as a hunter and thus membership of the ritually powerful hunting guild. It is quite possible that precisely on the basis of this shared past the old man confidently dared present himself at the court. The king's action amounts to a rejection of all this. Sipopa confronts the kinship etiquette, sorcery connotations and his personal obligations of reciprocity vis-à-vis a subjugated ethnic group, with the physical and symbolic power invested in the Lozi state: a power not only manifestly superior to the old man's but deriving, as it were, from a different logical universe – the state – and implying yet a third logical universe: peripheral capitalism and European penetration in general. As such, the anecdote is similar to standard tales of Lozi arrogance circulating among contemporary Nkoya. If told before a twentieth-century Nkoya audience the tale would immediately summon the resentment that Nkoya have built up in over a century of domination by the Lozi state under conditions (from 1900 onwards) of outside, European support. Twentieth-century patterns of Nkoya ethnicisation are to be understood in the light of this resentment.

The underlying model is by now well-defined, and in the Lozi case rather perfectly executed. Although Sipopa was certainly a Lozi king, with all the Nkoya connotations in his biography including his uncontested mastery of the Nkoya language, one could argue about his being equally a Nkoya king as well. Similar tales of cruelty are told about other kings who were indisputably Nkoya: *Mwene* Kayambila (ca. 1820), whose self-chosen praise-name (Kayambila means 'Thatcher') refers to head-hunting;<sup>38</sup> *Mwene* Liyoka (ca. 1850), the terror of the Nduwe ethnic group in the Kataba area; *Mwene* Shamamano Kahare (ca. 1880-1913), who gained his kingship under direct protection of Sipopa's successor the famous Lubosi Lewanika I (1878-1884, 1885-1916), but was deprived from his royal orchestra (the principal public mark of kingship) by the same Lozi king when in drunkenness Shamamano had murdered his musicians. But these exemplary incarnations of the violent male model as prevalent at nineteenth-century Nkoya courts should not deceive us. Despite the ideal-typical representation in Table 1 the important thing for an understanding of Nkoya political history is that such total departure from the

---

<sup>38</sup> Either through the display of enemy skulls on the thatched roof of his palace, or by metonymically conceiving of the cranium as the roof of the head.

social and symbolic order of village society was never fully attained by the states, which, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, sought to come to full fruition on the Kafue/ Zambezi watershed.

For these Nkoya states failed to make full use of the Lunda heritage of perpetual kinship and position succession; and they equally failed to build, out of the social and symbolic material available, a result that radically deviated from that material, transforming it into the basis for a viable new domain of exploitation hinging, not primarily on kinship or the economy, but on the political structure. The Nkoya myth of state origin hints at transformation of the pre-state society, but at the same time stresses considerable continuity with the past. Nkoya states did erode the gender-indifferent, pacifist and reciprocity-based cosmological framework and the kinship structure that informed the constituent village communities. But they did not fundamentally surpass nor eradicate that ancient, pre-statal cosmological framework, and hence – despite nominal proximity to Weber's state definition – remained *inchoate* states, always subject to the internal kinship dynamics of the dynastic group, and to the vicissitudes of tribute and external pressure. It was therefore, probably, that in the second half of the nineteenth century the Nkoya states proved to be no match, not for the Kololo, the Lozi or the Yeke, nor indeed for the colonial state. Not unlikely, the geographical position of Nkoyaland in the far interior, where trade routes from east and west fizzled out into ever smaller capillaries carrying only a small trade volume, was an additional factor in this ultimately thwarted state formation.

## Conclusion

Let us end by identifying the wider implications of the views presented in this paper on the basis of my study of merely one remote corner of rural South Central Africa.

Instead of discontinuity, the assumption of basic continuity (in terms of cosmology, organisation, and personnel) between state and civil society (i.e. between indigenous African states and the village communities they dominate) has been one of the implicit tenets of political anthropology in this part of the world. Was not the Lozi king as depicted in Gluckman's classic studies the very embodiment of the land, to the extent of even deriving his title, *Litunga* (which – like in Nkoya – literally means 'land' in the Luyana court language which has survived Kololo/Lozi language imposition), from that identity?<sup>39</sup> Did not the principles of justice (i.e. 'the reasonable man' – since Gluckman a catch phrase of legal anthropological textbooks), kinship, reciprocity, shape court–

---

<sup>39</sup> Gluckman 1969a.

village relations as they did relations within and between villages? Thus considered, the pre-colonial African state in South Central and Southern would be mainly a village at an exalted scale – and this is a (highly deceptive) cliché; it underlies much classic anthropological description and has also been adopted as valid by numerous colonial and post-colonial political actors on the African scene.

A restatement of the same idea of continuity is found in Jeff Guy's somewhat mechanical application of Marxist modes-of-production analysis of the pre-colonial societies of Southern Africa, to the effect that

‘...differences between chief and homestead-heads were differences in degree and not differences in kind’, [so that the only real] subordinate class consisted of women and children, the product of their labour being appropriated by their husbands and fathers’.<sup>40</sup>

If it is possible to generalise in these terms about the well-documented kingships of the Zulu, Swazi, Sotho, Tswana etc. (which of course are not in all respects comparable to their Zambian counterparts), one wonders what would happen to the picture if violence, state-village discontinuity and state-village exploitation were re-introduced into it. I have been enough of a Marxist myself to insist that Marxism, which Guy invokes as his theoretical frame, does not necessarily imply shallowness for the cultural dimension of our analysis.

The history of ideas suggests various possible reasons why, with reference to pre-colonial African states, state-village continuity would be stressed by the scholarly analysts at the expense of violence, exploitation and discontinuity. Let us limit ourselves to the Gluckman case. In colonial, Protectorate Barotseland (the fact of its colonial domination was taken for granted and scarcely explicitly discussed in anthropological discussions of internal, ‘tribal’ power relations at the time), Gluckman identified strongly with the Lozi indigenous administration, which accorded him almost princely status and which, moreover, was highly favoured by the colonial administration. As a legal anthropologist, his window on the society of Western Zambia around 1940 was that of formal courts of law in the Lozi heart-land of Mongu-Lealui district;<sup>41</sup> as an economic and political anthropologist, his window was simply the Lozi king's court at Lealui. Building up professional respectability was still high on the agenda of the young anthropological discipline when Gluckman's career was at its peak, but of comparable priority – and laudably so, in the face of blatant racism and colonial arrogance – was the vindication of the colonial African subject as capable of creating and governing responsible, well-ordered societies based on philosophical and cosmological principles not inferior to

---

<sup>40</sup> Guy 1987: 24; also approvingly quoted in Gulbrandsen 1993.

<sup>41</sup> On the limitations of this perspective, *cf.* van Binsbergen 1977.

those of Europe. African social systems had to be described as integrated structures, and even if Gluckman was a pioneer of the introduction of conflict in that setting,<sup>42</sup> conflict to him still did not imply a fundamental and lasting structural cleavage or discontinuity, but a passing stage to a new equilibrium. Moreover, there is no doubt that the Lozi aristocracy's political ideology considered itself as continuous with the (Lozi) village life-world; but such a claim needs to be deconstructed as part of political strategy.

Finally, Protectorate Barotseland, where tribute labour and slavery had gradually disappeared since their formal abolition in the 1910s, had a well-functioning indigenous administration, whose violence (apart from the occasional flogging or expulsion of convicts, and cases of ritual murder only very sporadically seeping through to the colonial administration and thus to the current Zambia National Archives) was largely structural (e.g. in terms of humiliation of the outlying ethnic groups including the Nkoya) and moreover could hardly be told apart from the violence of the colonial state itself.

All these considerations would converge towards a view stressing cultural and organisational continuity both between colonial present of the 1940s and pre-colonial past, and between indigenous 'state' and village, in Barotseland. In many ways, moreover, Gluckman, a South African whose PhD research had been on Zululand,<sup>43</sup> shared the ideological position of other radical White South African intellectuals vis-à-vis Black Africans and their societies. His vindicative, positive approach may have a rather direct link with for instance Guy's position almost half a century later. If pre-colonial African kings are merely an elaboration of the people's ideology and social organisation, these kings' contemporary significance for the oppressed descendants of the same people could be viewed in a far more positive light than if these kings, in their own way, represented forms of cultural discontinuity, exploitation and violence not entirely incomparable to those of the apartheid state. The struggle for a balanced assessment of violence in pre-colonial Africa as against the colonial situation has understandably been a major theme in modern African literature since Stanlake Samkange's *On trial for my country*,<sup>44</sup> and Yambo Ouologuem's *Le devoir de violence*.<sup>45</sup>

And these are not just fine points of scholarship or *belles lettres*. The issues, intimately related, of violence and the socially constructed and cherished images of pre-colonial African society have become crucial in the

---

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Gluckman 1955, 1963.

<sup>43</sup> Gluckman 1940; it cannot be ruled out that he did project Zulu models – with perhaps more intrinsic continuity – onto Barotseland.

<sup>44</sup> Samkange 1966.

<sup>45</sup> Ouologuem 1968.

transformation of South Africa today. In the decade before majority rule was established in South Africa, the main Zulu ethnic organisation, Inkatha, dreamed of Shaka's Zulu's state nearly two centuries ago, and found there the inspiration for a type of inter-ethnic and inter-racial violence which were no longer abhorred but appeared as hallowed by tradition or identity.<sup>46</sup> In such a present, where the image of past chiefly violence leads to simulacra of violence on the contemporary political scene, a fresh look at historical contradictions may be helpful to come to terms with the future.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Maré & Hamilton 1987; Golan 1991; and for more optimistic view (note the date of publication) Schlemmer 1980. For recent re-evaluations of the *mfecane* image (the chain reaction of conflict and dispersal in Southern Africa allegedly started by Shaka in the first quarter of the 19th century), cf. Eldredge 1992; Hamilton 1992.

<sup>47</sup> POSTSCRIPT: In retrospect, one further consideration should have been addressed in my argument. I sketch a sociology of knowledge by virtue of which Max Gluckman, almost an honorary Lozi prince, appears to have had no option but to insist on non-violence, and on cultural continuity, between the Lozi indigenous state and commoner villages. In footnote 3 of this paper, I reveal myself to be an adoptive Nkoya prince; yet, considering my argument, I apparently have no qualms at presenting a picture of the violent pre-colonial past of my adoptive royal relatives, and stressing two forms of cultural discontinuity: (a) between royals and commoners, and (b) between the pre-colonial and the (post-)colonial situation. Am I suggesting to be governed, decades after Independence, by a different sociology of knowledge than Gluckman was half a century before me, writing in the heyday of British colonialism? That is a distinct possibility. Meanwhile, considering Mudimbe's (1997) stress on the Freudian Oedipal scheme in the context of the liberation of African difference, it would not be totally absurd to suggest that an Oedipal transference from my personal life onto my historical research has rendered me rather enamoured with the image of pacifist, clan-based female ritual leaders who were subsequently ousted by violent men; or that such a subconscious orientation made me identify too much as an Nkoya, against Gluckman (an obvious father figure to me) as the Nkoya's hereditary enemy, a Lozi. But perhaps we need not delve so deeply, and so individually. In Kaoma district in the last decades of the twentieth century, village-court cultural continuity, and non-violence, have become facts, so there is little left any more for me to be secretive about. From a point of view of the global and universalist human-rights discourse of the late twentieth century, or, alternatively, from a point of view of self-censoring political correctness commonly imposed on Northern representations of South social realities (as part of the politics of knowledge attending African Studies), the unpleasant sides of pre-colonial royal power in Africa are generally expected to be bowdlerised, aestheticised, or concealed. But these universalist and academic discourses do not necessarily coincide with the particularist discourse of Nkoya royal circles today. To boast of their pre-colonial forbears' violence and excessive contempt of slaves, even in the face of resentment expressed by locals from commoner or slave descent, has remained a trait of Nkoya royals to this day. Naïvely, or in a half-deliberate attempt at intercultural identification, I may simply have emulated this trait in my argument. Whatever the case, in the decade since this argument was first conceived in the Dutch language, I have resigned myself to the contradictions of prolonged participatory social research in Africa by someone, like myself, hailing from the North Atlantic region; cf. van Binsbergen, in press. And in my subsequent Nkoya research I have concentrated, more than on the violence theme (however, cf. van Binsbergen 1996), on the exploration of the transregional and intercontinental strands of the history of South Central African kingship first hinted at in this paper (cf. van Binsbergen, forthcoming).